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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

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## THE RELIGIOUS WORKER AND THE SUMMER SCHOOL.

DURING the summer months a multitude of ministers and Sunday-school teachers will be gathered in the innumerable summer schools and Chautauquas with which the country now abounds. There they will listen to lectures, will attend normal classes, will hold conferences and "question-boxes." And all in the interest of Bible study. Then, after a few days or a fortnight—for the schools offering instruction for a longer period are few—the thoroughly American compound of instruction, concerts, stereopticon lectures, and religion will reach an end, and both lecturers and students will return to their accustomed, if less intense, life.

Will it all have paid?

Our question concerns the religious worker alone. In the case of others there can be no question that the summer school has been of inestimable value. Thousands of plain men and women have found new impulse and ambition to make more of the higher and better things of life. The very entertainments have served to attract and arouse those who otherwise might have shared but little in any real intellectual life. But with this phase of the matter we are not concerned. It is conceivable that this might all be true, and yet that these meetings should be of injury to the minister and the Sunday-school teacher. With them intellectual stimulus can hardly suffice. They must be spurred as well to better conceptions of religious truth, to more self-sacrificing ideals of service.

There is actual possibility that harm may result to religious workers from these short sessions of lectures and classes.

**THE DANGERS  
IN THE SUMMER  
SCHOOL TO  
RELIGIOUS  
WORKERS:  
1. OF RESTING  
CONTENT WITH  
SUPERFICIALITY**

First of all there is the ever-present danger of treating truth superficially. Ten days hardly suffice even with intellectual men and women for the proper discussion of many of the questions in biblical study. Nor do many of these summer schools propose anything like serious class work. Lectures, generally of a popular sort, are the rule in most programs, and these often are upon such a variety of subjects as to make anything like genuine instruction difficult. Now, superficiality, bad as it is in any matter, becomes really dangerous in the case of theology. At the best it will give one a complacent content in his own prejudices, if it does not breed in one a contempt for all genuine study. There are few more hopeless pupils than those who have grasped superficial teaching, and in consequence cannot conceive of difficulties yet to be mastered. It is only too easy for the assembly lecturer to present *ex cathedra* solutions of difficulties and for the assembly student to mistake interesting illustration for serious argument.

Nor is this the only danger. From the very fact that the lecturer addresses a miscellaneous audience full of doctrinal zeal as well as Christian devotion, he is tempted to appeal to prejudice and, in case he is brought face to face with some of the real difficulties of biblical study, to belittle, if not to ridicule, opinions not acceptable to those to whom he speaks. We would not be misunderstood here. It is an axiom of pedagogy and common-sense not to force radical views upon unprepared pupils. The rôle of the iconoclast seldom suits the religious teacher, and biblical study is something other than the discussion of critical theories. Yet to avoid hurting one's hearers' cherished opinions is quite other than appealing to their prejudices, and among the duties of the lecturer must always be the wise introduction of his class or audience into the spirit of historical rather than the conventional study of the Scriptures. To leave a lecture with

**2. THE  
ENFORCEMENT  
OF PREJUDICES**

one's views confirmed may be a testimony to the demagogism of the lecturer rather than to the correctness of one's views.

But over against these two dangers there are more than counterbalancing advantages. That intellectual stimulus which the assembly engenders in its attendants is greatly needed by all religious workers. Strange as it seems, whether because of the distractions of its various duties, or the opportunity to re-work rather than to create teaching, or the demand for entertainment rather than instruction on the part of the churches, there is no learned profession so liable to intellectual decay as the ministry. Unless there come some stimulus from without, many preachers will not study seriously the questions with which they are vitally concerned. The summer school will not, it cannot, educate, but it can give religious workers this stimulus. And so it is that perhaps the best possible vacation for the overworked—or the underworking—pastor is that passed in the almost feverish life of some summer assembly. It is a mistake to think that the woods and the seashore are the best places for all tired people. That vacation is the most rational which brings into play energies commonly dormant and leaves unused those usually strained. For the religious worker who has had little time to think, or who has had no inducement to study, the mere companionship of those who are at least trying to think, and who certainly are interested in matters of literature and science, is a tonic and a source of new ambitions. The summer school has saved many a minister from intellectual suicide.

In the same way, if it has given the proper attention to its lecturers, the summer school will widen his theological horizon and deepen his religious life. The dangers to which we have referred are not too great to be avoided, and the presence of genuinely honest, open-minded men among his audience will go far toward delivering the lecturer from his various temptations. The great prerequisite is that the religious teacher, for the few days he once more plays the part of learner, shall become teachable.

*THE  
ADVANTAGES:  
1. INTELLECTUAL  
STIMULUS*

*2. THE  
AWAKENING OF  
THEOLOGICAL  
INTEREST*

It is a difficult metamorphosis, as any person who has resolutely made attempt can testify. For it is much easier to criticise than to learn; to select material that supports one's views than to change one's views to suit new facts; to test one's teachers' use of shibboleths than to investigate the worth of their pronouncements. Yet one can choose the more difficult member of each antithesis, if he but so will.

Only he should study as well as listen. Not that lectures like those mentioned elsewhere in this number of the BIBLICAL WORLD will not be of assistance even to mere hearers, but that this assistance can be greatly increased if one becomes an active, rather than a passive, learner. It is not information, or even stimulus, alone that is needed, but a new discipline of one's intellectual forces in the interest of religion.

It is, therefore, with satisfaction that one reads the lists of lecturers and topics in the Bible schools of the different assemblies of the present summer. In many cases perhaps there is too little attention given to downright study, and too much to mere homiletic discoursing; but even with this allowance the effects of such work can hardly be overestimated. Hundreds and even thousands of men and women will return to their work in church and Sunday school with a new vigor, a new outlook, and a new appreciation of the possibilities of biblical study. And even if they may have learned but little in comparison with those who have seriously studied through the summer at a university or college, they will at least have received some inspiration to enter upon a more studious and more rational religious life. In the face of this achievement the warnings against continued work and the prophecies of physical breakdown in consequence of attendance upon summer classes seem as trifling as ill-timed.